



Syria

15 LGBT refugees say UK Home Office has 'abandoned' them to danger in Turkey

The group, many now in safehouses, say they are at risk of homophobic discrimination

Diane Taylor

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Fifteen LGBT Syrian refugees are launching a legal challenge on Monday against the Home Office claiming they have been abandoned to a life of danger in [Turkey](#), despite promises to bring them speedily to safety in the UK.

The Home Office accepted all 15 on to a [refugee resettlement scheme](#), which avoids the need for them to go through the often lengthy asylum process.

Yet many are still waiting to be airlifted to safety two years or more after applying for the scheme. Many have been forced to live in hiding as a result.

Resettlement schemes are considered the pinnacle of sanctuary options and people fleeing danger are accepted in [small numbers](#) to come to the UK. Other safe countries including France, Germany, Norway and Sweden participate in similar schemes. LGBT refugee friends of the 15 challenging the Home Office typically only waited three to five months after applying before they were brought to safety in those countries.

While delays are difficult for all refugees, the LGBT group says that because of homophobic discrimination and attacks in Turkey they are at particular risk and have been forced to lead double lives and to hide in “safehouses”.

Same-sex relationships are legal in Turkey but homophobic attitudes prevail and many LGBT refugees have reported being pelted by rocks, followed in the street and attacked if people suspect they are not heterosexual.

There have been murders of LGBT people in Turkey including of gay Syrian refugee Wisam Sankara in July 2016 and Turkish trans woman [Hande Kader](#) just weeks later.

LGBT Syrian refugees in Turkey are concerned about the risk from the population at large but also from their own families who often don't know about their sexual identity. The 15 refugees bringing the action against the Home Office say that gay men and trans women are in particular danger.

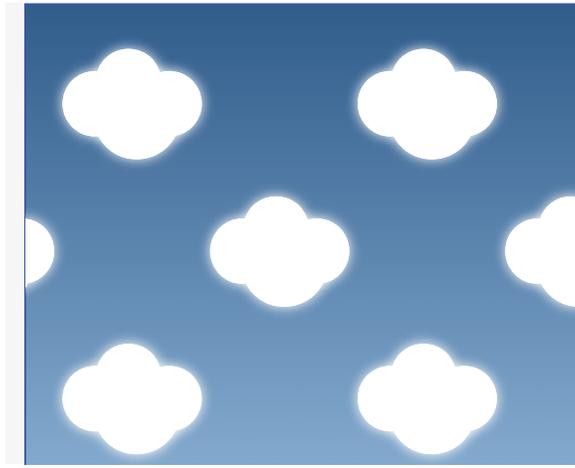
/// The shocking murder of trans activist Hande Kader says much about Turkey today
Elif Shafak

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One, who is hiding from his family who discovered that he is gay, spoke to the Guardian from a safe house in Istanbul: “I can't live in this country any more. I feel that at any moment my family could find me and kill me,” he said. “I'm gay but I can't say I'm gay. You can't even look at a man in the street here. It's high-level dangerous.

“One LGBTQ+ Syrian refugee I know has been waiting more than two years for the UK Home Office to bring him to safety. He has been stabbed twice because of his sexuality.” He said all 15 feel abandoned by the Home Office.

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A volunteer who has been supporting LGBT Syrian refugees in Istanbul has asked not to be named for fear of identifying the people she is supporting. She said: “During my time here I have seen how dangerous life is for all LGBTQ Syrian refugees. They are isolated individuals in a homophobic country. I have witnessed discrimination, harassment and physical violence against them. One trans person I know was held hostage as a sex slave for several days until she managed to escape. In 2017 a member of this community was murdered and decapitated.”

She added that it was particularly hard for the 15 to see LGBT refugee friends leaving Turkey to start new lives in other countries’ resettlement schemes.

“It’s always the same UK group waving them off at the bus wondering when it’s their turn.”

In their legal action the 15 refugees claim that government officials are subjecting them to inhuman and degrading treatment and breaching human rights law. They are calling on the Home Office to take “immediate steps” to sort the issue out. They told the Guardian that the situation is extremely urgent and that they are in constant danger.

Toufique Hossain and Sheroy Zaq of Duncan Lewis solicitors, who are representing the 15 LGBT refugees, said: “We met these brave individuals in Istanbul. Having fled their homes in [Syria](#), their hope was finally for a life where they could be themselves and live freely.

“Their stories are truly heartbreaking. We really do hope that the Home Office expedites these applications without the need for further litigation. They’ve known of the urgency for quite some time. They must act swiftly.”

A refugee waiting to get to the UK said: “In Syria we saw a lot and went through a lot. In Turkey we are in danger again. We must hide all the time. We are told: ‘Just wait, your file is with the Home Office.’ Everyone has his own dream: to love, to study, to marry, to have rights. The most important thing is to be safe and then we can start to think about these things.”

A Home Office spokesman said: “We do not routinely comment on individual cases.” Home Office sources said it can take time to find suitable placements to meet the specific needs of individuals.

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Stranded LGBT+ Asylum Seekers To Bring Case Against UK



By [Meka Beresford](#)

Freelance News Editor

16th April 2019

A group of LGBT+ asylum seekers who were promised asylum in the UK but remain stranded in Turkey are threatening legal action as they fear their sexuality puts them at risk of violence.

The group of 15 refugees were promised asylum under the Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Programme, but two years later they remain in Istanbul and say they have faced discrimination from other refugees, as well as Turkish citizens.

Duncan Lewis, the law firm representing the group, has sent a letter on their behalf to the Home Office explaining the discrimination the refugees have faced and promised to initiate legal action unless their cases are moved forward.

LGBT+ Asylum Seekers



Credit: [Ilias Bartolini/Flickr](#)

Sheroy Zaq, a solicitor at Duncan Lewis, told [the Thomson Reuters Foundation](#) that the refugees are concealing their identity in public because they are scared of being recognised and attacked.

“Pretty much every client that we spoke to mentioned that they had to essentially hide,” Zaq explained.

“For some of them, the minute they leave their home, they have to wear a mask when they are walking down the street in Turkey, not only in terms of fear of physical and verbal abuse from the general public but also from authorities.”

It is not illegal to be LGBT+ in Turkey, but societal attitudes are negative and hate crimes are frequent within the country – with at least 41 hate motivated murders having been recorded between 2010 and 2014.

“The minute they leave their home, they have to wear a mask when they are walking down the street in Turkey.”

Sheroy Zaq, a lawyer for the refugees

The Home Office has faced criticism over the way it has handled LGBT+ asylum seeker cases, as the number of rejected cases of LGBT+ refugees rose 52 per cent in two years from 2015.

A total of 78 per cent of asylum claims mentioning sexuality were rejected in 2017.

Campaigners have called the figures “deeply worrying”, as refugees are forced to return to countries where they face discrimination, prison, violence and sometimes death.

The Trauma Of Hiding Your Identity



Credit: [Ggia/Wikimedia Commons](#)

Leila Zadeh, the executive director of the UK Lesbian and Gay Immigration Group, explained that the longer the refugees are hiding their true selves, the more trauma it will cause.

“The whole time that people are waiting they are suffering every single day as they cannot be themselves and get on with their lives,” Zadeh said.

“They are also living with the fear they are not ever going to be safe and not knowing if they are going to be forced back to the country they escaped at some point.”

Much of the stress that causes trauma comes from the requirement to provide documents that prove a refugee was victimised because of their sexuality.

“The whole time that people are waiting they are suffering every single day as they cannot be themselves and get on with their lives.”

Executive director of the UK Lesbian and Gay Immigration Group, Leila Zadeh

Adeniyi Raji faced deportation last year to his home country of Nigeria after [being held for six months in a detention centre](#). Raji fled Nigeria after his wife caught him with his partner, and instigated attacks against him. His evidence was nullified by the Home Office.

“I was attacked on several occasions. As soon as she saw us, she immediately raised the alarm. People gathered and started beating us severely. After that, she divorced me. The Nigerian police started publishing my pictures and my name in the Nigerian national dailies.

“They kept saying that anyone who has useful information that could lead to my arrest should come forward [so that I can] face the wrath of the land as a result of my sexual orientation,” [Raji said](#).

The Home Office denied his application for asylum as there wasn't enough evidence. He is still in the appeal process.

‘Anne Frank’ Policy Forces People To Hide Their Sexuality



Credit: [Volkan Olmez / Unsplash](#)

Until 2010, the Home Office were allowed to reject LGBT+ asylum cases and issued guidance to them to hide their sexuality to remain safe.

However, [this was outlawed by the UK Supreme Court](#) in HJ (Iran) v Secretary of State for the Home Department [2010] UKSC 31.

The court said the controversial “Anne Frank” policy, which was in place from 2006, forced people to hide who they were – and like the famous Jewish girl – would be in severe danger if they did not hide.

“To pretend a person’s sexuality does not exist, is to deny them the fundamental right to be who they are,” one judge noted in the ruling.

Main image credit: [mathiaswasik/Flickr](#)

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15 LGBT+ Syrian refugees are taking legal action against the UK's Home Office as they claim that they have been abandoned by the refugee resettlement scheme.

The refugees—who live in Turkey—were accepted on the scheme two years ago but have yet to be resettled in the UK. They claim that their lives are in danger in Turkey due to rampant homophobia and transphobia, [according to the Guardian](#).

Other [refugees](#) accepted on the scheme waited between three to five months to be relocated to the UK, the newspaper reported.

LGBT+ refugees say homophobia is rampant in Turkey

Refugees who spoke to the publication said that life in Turkey is extremely difficult and that homophobia is rampant. Some live in safe houses and are forced to live “double lives.”



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They claim that their lives are in danger from strangers on the street and from their families, many of whom do not accept LGBT+ people.

“Ministers must urgently improve the speed and quality of decisions on asylum claims.”

– Refugee Action’s Stephen Hale

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One of the refugees said he knows somebody who has been waiting two years to be relocated under the refugee resettlement programme. He has been stabbed twice because of his sexual orientation.

They said they feel abandoned by the Home Office in the UK and live in daily fear of homophobic or transphobic attacks.



STR/AFP/Getty

Other refugees are waiting on the Home Office to make decisions on their claims for six months or more

The UK government introduced the Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement programme in 2015 with an intention to bring 20,000 Syrians into the UK for protection. The United Nation's Refugee Agency assesses cases before referring them to the Home Office.

Despite this, many refugees have found themselves in limbo as they wait for the Home Office to meet their obligations and bring them to safety.

The refugees are being represented by Duncan Lewis solicitors. Sheroy Zaq, lead solicitor on the case, told PinkNews: "Our clients have already been accepted onto the resettlement scheme. As such, the Home Office is aware that they are vulnerable refugees, at heightened risk in Turkey.

"They have told us that they simply cannot wear a mask any longer; they want to be themselves, in public and in private. It is sincerely hoped that the UK takes heed of this request and acts with an element of urgency in ensuring that our clients are brought to the UK at the earliest possible opportunity."

Refugee Action, a UK group that advocates for refugee rights, said in February that there was a record number of people waiting six months or more for the Home Office to make a decision on their applications for refuge.

The group's chief executive Stephen Hale said: "Ministers must urgently improve the speed and quality of decisions on asylum claims.

"Ministers must also let people work, if no decision has been made on their claim after six months. This simple change would vastly improve the lives of the individuals and families currently forced to live in a constant state of anxiety and frustration."

LGBT+ Syrian refugees launch case against UK for leaving them in Turkey

by [Sonia Elks](#) | [@SoniaElks](#) | Thomson Reuters Foundation

Monday, 15 April 2019 13:57 GMT



The group have been waiting for up to two years in Istanbul, where they face double discrimination from both fellow refugees and Turkish people

By Sonia Elks

LONDON, April 15 (Thomson Reuters Foundation) - A group of LGBT+ Syrian refugees launched a legal challenge against Britain on Monday, saying it offered them asylum but left them in Turkey, where their sexuality puts them in danger.

The 15 refugees have been forced to conceal their sexuality in Istanbul and are constantly at risk of attacks while they wait to be taken to Britain, lawyers representing them said.

"Pretty much every client that we spoke to mentioned that they had to essentially hide," Sheroy Zaq, a solicitor at Duncan Lewis law firm representing the group, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

"For some of them, the minute they leave their home, they have to wear a mask when they are walking down the street in Turkey, not only in terms of fear of physical and verbal abuse from the general public but also from authorities."

A spokesman for the Home Office said: "We do not routinely comment on individual cases."

Although homosexuality is legal in Turkey, LGBT+ people face widespread discrimination and lack legal protections.

At least 41 LGBT+ people were murdered in hate crimes between 2010 and 2014 in Turkey, rights groups said in a report to the United Nations in 2015.

They also faced violent attacks, workplace discrimination and harassment, the report said.

All of those bringing the legal challenge were offered a safe haven in Britain under the Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Programme, according to the law firm.

They have been left waiting for up to two years in Istanbul, where they face double discrimination from both fellow refugees and Turkish people, said Zaq.

Solicitors for the group of refugees have written to the Home Office raising concerns and warning they are preparing to launch court action if the issues are not quickly resolved.

Long delays for those seeking asylum or waiting for resettlement in Britain must be addressed to avoid adding to stress and trauma for refugees, said Leila Zadeh, the executive director of the UK Lesbian and Gay Immigration Group.

"The whole time that people are waiting they are suffering every single day as they cannot be themselves and get on with their lives," she said.

"They are also living with the fear they are not ever going to be safe and not knowing if they are going to be forced back to the country they escaped at some point." (Reporting by Sonia Elks @soniaelks; Editing by Claire Cozens. Please credit the Thomson Reuters Foundation, the charitable arm of Thomson Reuters, that covers humanitarian news, women's and LGBT+ rights, human trafficking, property rights, and climate change. Visit <http://news.trust.org>)

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